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Cuba Executes Four Described as CIA Spies

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WASHINGTON -- The

Cuban government reported Thursday it had executed four exiles described as members of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.

Informed sources said the execution at dawn Thursday was intended as an object lesson to other exiles and that the four probably were captured in late March or early April while trying to infiltrate Cuba.

The firing-squad executions, announced by Havana Radio and in Havana newspapers, come in the wake of promises by leading Cuban exile organizations to launch guerrilla and sabotage campaigns against the regime of Premier Fidel Castro.

Try to Land

The official Cuban announcement said the four men were CIA agents and were captured as they tried to land on the north coast of central Las Villas province.

No date of the capture was given. But the leader of the group, Felipe Vidal Santiago, is known to have disappeared about two months ago.

Informed sources said, meanwhile, that withdrawal of Soviet military personnel from Cuba is continuing at a modest pace.

They said the Russians still control the 24 anti-aircraft missile sites ringing the island, but that whether control will pass to Cubans upon completion of the training program is not yet known.

Estimated at 5,000

The number of Russian troops still in Cuba is roughly estimated at 5,000, down from a high of about 22,000 during the missile crisis of October, 1962.

Most of the remaining Russians are expected to leave when the training program is completed, probably early this

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summer. It is believed the Russians will maintain a permanent military advisory group in Cuba, however.

The Cuban government said the four executed exiles were captured by frontier guards of the interior ministry after their boat was sighted by fishermen.

"The operation was organized, directed and financed by the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States of North America," the announcement said.

U.S. officials declined to comment beyond saying that "as usual, Castro has described people he executes as CIA agents."

Sometimes the Castro regime is right when it announces the arrest or execution of CIA operatives. In this instance, however, it is believed the four exiles were not connected with the CIA.

Others Identified

In addition to Vidal Santiago, the Cuban government identified the other three exiles as Ladislao Gonzalez Benitez, Elias Rivera Bello and Alfredo Valdes Linares.

Havana said the four men were executed after their conviction by a war crimes tribunal and rejection of their appeal. It said the men left Miami in a boat and made a stop near Cayo Anguila in the Bahamas en route to Cuba.

They threw their weapons, including a 20mm cannon, into the sea as the frontier guard boat approached, the Cuban government said.

Vidal Santiago, 38, served as a naval officer under both the Fulgencio Batista and Castro regimes. He went into exile in 1960 and had been living in Miami.

It was reliably learned that he had been in the business of helping people escape from Cuba.

Informed sources disputed the Cuban government's claim that his group was working with Manuel Ray, junta (JURE) exile organization.

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